

PLEDGES

I always make pledges, but I never send the money. Something happens between the time I hang up and the time I sit down to write the check. The victims seem less sick, less crippled, they're probably running the 200-yard dash by now. The reminder notice comes, but it only reminds me of what I pledged, not what I felt at the time I pledged. I need some reminder of how I felt, some proof that it was the right way to feel, that I wasn't simply being manipulated and duped. But the buisnesslike tone of the letter says, in effect, if you were duped, you were duped. You still owe the money.

THE RECLINER

I tilt the recliner back and it keeps going, right through the carpet and floor to the center of the earth. The layers of frost and rock look exactly the way they do in science books. Cross-sections. Layers of pebbly material folding over each other in gray and charcoal waves. What a mistake to buy a recliner when I'm still a relatively young man, at least in terms of the age of the earth. And to choose maroon, the oldest of all colors. I don't clash with anything down here, which probably means there's less chance of getting out.

THE REGINALD DENNY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Maybe tomorrow the curfew will be lifted, and we can go outside and sit in the shade again. Just about every public building has been set on fire. There are even people trying to set the fires on fire. If they come here, I'll probably have to hand over the last of my board games to appease them. The books went days ago, including all my manuals on how to play the games. It's going to be a strange new beginning for me. I already have some interesting things growing in my root cellar. All I have to do now is not starve or surrender before I can eat them.